

Eastern Illinois University

The Keep

Plan B Papers

Student Theses & Publications

1-1-1966

The Ladies Being Ghosts: Faulkner's Southern Gentlewomen

David Lawrence Walker

Follow this and additional works at: https://thekeep.eiu.edu/plan_b

Recommended Citation

Walker, David Lawrence, "The Ladies Being Ghosts: Faulkner's Southern Gentlewomen" (1966). *Plan B Papers*. 510.

https://thekeep.eiu.edu/plan_b/510

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Plan B Papers by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

THE LADIES BEING GHOSTS:

FAULKNER'S SOUTHERN GENTLEWOMEN
(TITLE)

BY

DAVID LAWRENCE WALKER

PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION
AND PREPARED IN COURSE

ENGLISH 592

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY,
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1966
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE DEGREE, M.S. IN ED.

7-25-66
DATE

[REDACTED]

ADVISER

7-25-66
DATE

[REDACTED]

DEPARTMENT HEAD

The Ladies Being Ghosts

'Ah,' Mr. Compson said. 'Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?'¹

Such are the words of the Southern gentleman, the cultivated, cultured nihilist, Mr. Jason Compson III to his son Quentin. He is speaking of Miss Rosa Coldfield, the "Civil War maiden-poetess." In Absalom, Absalom!, after the death of Miss Rosa's father during the Civil War, she is faced with the decision to support herself or to move in with her dead sister's family at Sutpen's Hundred. Faulkner writes that "the natural thing would have been for her to go out and live with Judith, the natural thing for her or any Southern woman, gentlewoman. She would not have needed to be asked; no one would expect her to wait to be. Because that's what a Southern lady is."² The writer of this paper became intrigued as to what identity, or role, the Southern lady has in the traditional concept and as to how Faulkner's ladies are related to this concept.

William Faulkner has constructed these female characters: Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp, in "Was" of Go Down, Moses; Miss Rosa Coldfield, Mrs. Ellen Coldfield Sutpen, and Miss Judith Sutpen, of Absalom, Absalom!; Mrs. Carolina Bascomb Compson and Miss Candace "Caddy" Compson, of The Sound and the Fury; Miss Eunice Habersham, of Intruder in the Dust, who is named Miss Worsham in "Go Down, Moses" of Go Down, Moses.

¹William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Modern Library, 1936), p.12.

²Ibid., p. 88.

[Joanna Burden, of Light in August, is an example of a woman strong enough to guard and to maintain the business, the life-form, of her father and her brothers. However, she is not included in this paper because she is an "outsider," a Northern abolitionist. Even though she is immediately felt to be a Southern white woman upon her murder, she still does not fall into the category of a Southern gentlewoman.]

Faulkner has written these ladies into the accepted pattern for the Southern gentlewoman; they are very real and yet very vague figures. Volpe observes this fact when referring to Judith Sutpen: "Only intimations concerning the motives for her actions are provided, however. The effect is that she looms larger than life."³ Vickery explains the complex situation:

Since the clans are based on a male hierarchy, women naturally play a secondary role. It is, however, a clearly defined role which is integrated into the whole complex structure of the South. In one sense, women are merely transferrable property passing from clan to clan. Through marriage, they lose the name of their father's clan and become simply the instrument for the perpetuation of their husband's line and name.

To fulfill her position, the woman must possess two qualities -- purity of blood and chastity -- since both of these are necessary to ensure the uncontaminated continuance of the male hierarchy. Clearly, when stripped of all social niceties and bereft of the ritual and rhetoric of courtship, the lot of the woman appears menial and shabby.

It is not surprising, then, that the wives in Faulkner's novels are shadowy, unreal figures.

It is only during the absence of the father and the husband that the woman exercises her latent and repressed strength and asserts her own identity.⁴

³Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), p. 207.

⁴Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 258.

Tuck rates Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp, the "angular spinster who tries to translate reality into romance," as "one of the best of Faulkner's minor comic characters."⁵ Miss Sophonsiba insists that the plantation be called Warwick, to remind people that her brother Hubert is the true claimant to an English earldom. Faulkner's description of her is quite laughable: "Then they [Hubert, Uncle Buck, and McCaslin] stood in the hall, until presently there was jangling and swishing noise and they began to smell the perfume, and Miss Sophonsiba came down the stairs. Her hair was roached under a lace cap; she had on her Sunday dress and beads and a red ribbon around her throat and a little nigger girl carrying her fan. . . ." ⁶ She has a roan tooth. For a woman of her looks and her age, her coquetry is farcical; she coyly attempts to be an enchanting young belle besieged by suitors. She makes not-so-subtle remarks concerning marriage. Her metaphor that Uncle Buck is a "bee sipping from flower to flower and not staying long anywhere and all that stored sweetness to be wasted on Uncle Buddy's desert air . . . or maybe the honey was being stored up against the advent of a queen and who was the lucky queen and when?" ⁷ is amusing.

When Miss Sophonsiba passes out drinks, she has the hysterically coy manner of demonstrating that "nothing sweetens a Mississippi [sic] toddy like the hand of a Mississippi [sic] lady."⁸ However, the most

⁵Dorothy Tuck, Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), p. 185.

⁶William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York: Modern Library, 1940), p. 10.

⁷Ibid., p. 11.

⁸Ibid., p. 12.

farcical moment is the most calculated event; she traps Uncle Buck onto her bed at midnight and "gives the first scream." Well, this time Uncle Buck manages to elude the matrimonially minded Diana by winning a poker game with brother Hubert, but the flirtations continue -- "too fast and there was too much of it, the earrings and beads clashing and jingling like little trace chains on a toy mule trotting and the perfume stronger too, like the earrings and beads sprayed it out each time they moved"⁹ -- and finally Miss Sophonsiba and Uncle Buck are married.

Thus, the Beauchamp strain flows into the McCaslin clan, and this union results in Issac McCaslin. The prerequisites, name and virtue, ensure the male hierarchy. Faulkner then allows this most comic character to fade into a hilarious shadow.

Vickery labels Miss Rosa Coldfield a "shadow among shadows."¹⁰ Miss Rosa is a moral cripple who has "confused a system of belief with experimental reality."¹¹ Tuck summarizes Miss Rosa's life:

Rosa speaks of herself as having been old even as a child, of never having had a girlhood. Frustrated and lonely from youth, she becomes an embittered spinster who feels the ruin of her life and happiness to be the fault of her brother-in-law, Thomas Sutpen, and makes her hatred of him the center of her empty existence. Never having had a life of her own, she at first lives vicariously through others: she suffers as she imagines her elder sister Ellen had suffered by being the wife of Sutpen, whom she calls a demon; she falls in love with her image of Charles Bon, her niece Judith's finance, and relives what she believes must be Judith's feelings about her approaching marriage. Despite her fear and hatred of Sutpen, she becomes engaged to marry him after Ellen's death; however, when he suggests that their marriage be conditional upon her bearing a male heir, she leaves Sutpen's Hundred in outrage. She spends the next forty-three years in poverty, wearing black as if widowed, but married to the past.¹²

⁹Ibid., p.11.

¹⁰Vickery, p. 218.

¹¹Ibid., p. 217.

¹²Tuck, p. 191.

Miss Rosa is an odd mixture of romanticism and moralism. She is born to middle-aged parents, and her mother dies in childbirth. The world and security of parental love was never hers; she was reared by a hated father and an embittered aunt. She speaks of her childhood as "that warped and spartan solitude . . . which . . . taught me to listen before I could comprehend. . . ."13 Volpe feels that she grew up in a mausoleum adult world, catching occasional glimpses of her sister Ellen and older niece and nephew, hearing snatches of conversations she did not understand, listening at doors, "too young to be a part of the only world that is open to her."14 Her natural youthful desire for experience is nullified by the old age of her parent, her culture, and her tradition with their insistence on living in memories of the past.15 She is separated from her immediate experience and her need for emotional involvement.

Such an isolation leaves Miss Rosa watching other people's lives unfold while her life remains unchanged; this feeds her fantasies merged in religion and romance. Her illusions are shattered when she meets reality.16 Ellen laughs; Judith is stone-faced; Sutpen is morally outrageous. Quite naturally, she retreats into her romantic isolation. Vickery writes that the "fine touch of the Civil War maiden-poetess, untouched by the brutalities of combat and so free to write of gallantry and honor and aesthetically placed wounds, is evident throughout."17

¹³Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 140.

¹⁴Volpe, p. 193.

¹⁵Vickery, p. 87.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid. p. 88.

Her "demonizing" of Sutpen and her interpretation of the past is nearly melodramatic; it is exaggerated to justify her moral judgments, and she peoples it with phantoms distorted. According to Vickery, "she is, in a sense, the perfect defender of the idols of the South, for she is never tempted either to question or to deny them."¹⁸ She lives in her past, outside present experience.

Miss Rosa's face was "soft dough" with eyes like coal pieces pressed into it; her prim hair was "that peculiar mouse-like shade . . . on which the sun does not often shine." Faulkner describes her small body as having an "air of curious and paradoxical awkwardness like a costume borrowed at the last moment and of necessity for a masquerade which she did not want to attend."¹⁹ Sitting bolt upright in a chair, Miss Rosa's legs would hang clear of the floor in "impotent and static rage."

Faulkner interestingly compares Miss Rosa and her house; "it too was somehow smaller than its actual size -- it was of two storys -- unpainted and a little shabby, yet with an air, a quality of grim endurance as though like her it had been created to fit into and complement a world in all ways a little smaller than the one in which it found itself."²⁰ She has worn black dresses for forty-three years. "The rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity" hits Quentin Compson as Miss Rosa's "wan haggard face" observes him. Her voice -- grim, haggard, and amazed -- would not cease; it would just vanish. Quentin does not recognize her "neat faded cramped script" to reveal "a character cold, implacable, and even ruthless."

¹⁸Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁹Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 65.

²⁰Ibid., p. 10.

In speaking of "the honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been impugned," Miss Rosa offers little defense for herself:

No. I hold no brief for myself. I don't plead youth. . . . I don't plead propinquity: . . . I don't plead material necessity: . . . And most of all, I do not plead myself: a yount woman emerging from a holocaust which had taken parents security and all from her, who had seen all that living meant to her fall into ruins about the feet of a few fitures with the shapes of men but with the names and statures of heroes.²¹

Even in her meager self-defense, Miss Rosa continues to be the "town's and the county's poetess laureate." However, in one particularly long passage, although relatively short for her, Miss Rosa gives an excellent analysis of her dream-unreality-existence:

Ay, wake up, Rosa; wake up -- not from what was, what used to be, but from what had not, could not have ever been; wake, Rosa -- not to what should, what might have been, but to what cannot, what must not, be; wake, Rosa, from the hoping, who did believe there is a seemliness to bereavement even though grief be absent; believed there would be need for you to save not love perhaps, not happiness nor peace, but what was left behind by widowing -- and found that there was nothing there to save; who to save her as you promised Ellen (not Charles Bon, not Henry: not either one of these from him or even from one another) and now too late, who would have been too late if you had come there from the womb or had been there already at the full strong capable mortal peak when she was born; who came twelve miles and nineteen years to save what did not need the saving, and lost instead yourself.²²

This is a rather accurate description, given in her sixties, using her nineteenth year as a touch-stone for her entire life.

²¹Ibid., pp. 17-19.

²²Ibid., p. 141.

Up to the last breath Miss Rosa maintains her Southern womanhood. Her name is untouched; her chastity is unchallenged however outraged her moral strength. She marries a self-born abstraction and obsession, and she bears no progeny but eulogies of "undefeat."

Faulkner writes of Ellen Coldfield differently. According to the traditional concept, it is the fate of the woman to be a pale reflection of her husband.²³ Ellen is no exception, although she does maintain a peculiar individuality as a social, if somewhat giddy, butterfly. She fulfills her role: she brings with her the aura of respectability and purity; she bears two children, particularly a male heir; she even continues the pattern when she seeks and fosters the engagement of Judith to Charles Bon. Mr. Compson relates that Ellen "spoke of Bon as if he were three inanimate objects in one, or perhaps one inanimate object for which she and her family would find three concordant uses."²⁴ Mr. Compson continues cynically: "I can imagine her engineering that courtship, supplying Judith and Bon with opportunities for trysts and pledges with a coy and unflagging ubiquity which they must have tried in vain to evade and escape."²⁵

In her late thirties, in her bloom-pushed Indian summer, Ellen "seemed not only to acquiesce, to be reconciled to her life and marriage, but to be actually proud of it."²⁶ Small-boned Ellen was

²³Vickery, p. 259.

²⁴Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 75.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 103-104.

²⁶Ibid., p. 68.

"fullbodied . . . not fat: just rounded and complete, the hair white, the eyes still even young." Mr. Compson, who seems rather fond of Ellen, says that her regal air was "not contemptuous, not even patronizing exactly, but with a bland and even childlike imposition upon the suffrance or good manners or sheer helplessness of the man."²⁷ She is very much the Southern lady.

When Ellen assumes her role of wife to Sutpen, she lives "from attitude to attitude against her background of chatelaine to the largest, wife to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate."²⁸ Faulkner develops her into the social butterfly, "gracious and assured and talking the most complete nonsense, speaking her bright set meaningless phrases out of the part which she had written for herself, of the duchess peripatetic with property soups and medicines among a soilless and uncompelled peasantry."²⁹ Ellen enjoys playing the lady of the manor. She is a childish although loving wife and mother. She laughs a good deal, chatters pretty phrases, delights in buying clothes and making plans for balls, dinners, and parties.

At this time Ellen goes through a "complete metamorphosis, emerging into her next lustrum with the finality of actual re-birth."³⁰ Faulkner best states this condition: "she had succeeded at last in evacuating not only the puritan heritage but reality itself; had immolated outrageous husband and incomprehensible children into shades;

²⁷Ibid., p. 73.

²⁸Ibid., P. 69.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 64.

escaped at last into a world of pure illusion in which, safe from any harm, she moved, lived."³¹

Christmas Eve finds Ellen at "the absolute halcyon of her butterfly's summer;" Christmas Day initially snaps her "unreal and weightless life." Her son Henry renounces his patrimony and leaves with Bon. Her daughter Judith's engagement is punctured. Her husband Thomas soon leaves to fight in the War. "Spent, amazed, and uncomprehending," without the sustenance of her strong husband, Ellen folds. The male hierarchy is beginning to crumble, and Ellen's role accordingly decreases.

In a shuttered room, Ellen takes to bed, "requiring the unremitting attention of a child while she waited with that amazed and passive uncomprehension to die."³² Then Ellen dies, "the butterfly of a forgotten summer two years defunctive now -- the substanceless shell, the shade impervious to any alternation of dissolution because of its very weightlessness: no body to be buried: just the shape, the recollection."³³

Faulkner writes, and Vickery's "male hierarchy" theory supports him, that Ellen Coldfield Sutpen is a "woman who, if she had had the fortitude to bear sorrow and trouble, might have risen to actual stardom in the role of the matriarch, arbitrating from the fireside corner of a crone the pride and destiny of her family, instead of turning at the last to the youngest member of it and asking her to protect the others."³⁴ Ellen had no such fortitude; her identity is both ethereal and ephemeral.

³¹Ibid., p. 69.

³²Ibid., p. 125.

³³Ibid., p. 126.

³⁴Ibid., p. 64.

Judith Sutpen, the daughter taller than her mother, is markedly different. Judith has inherited her father's characteristics -- strength, courage, and independence. However, as Volpe points out, only intimations concerning the motives for her actions are provided by Faulkner.³⁵ There is one consistently mentioned characteristic of Judith -- her impenetrable and serene face: "the niece's impenetrable dreaming:" "and Judith, the young girl dreaming, not living, in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness;" " and Judith listening with that serenity, that impenetrable tranquillity which a year or so before had been the young girl's vague and pointless and dreamy unvolition but was now already a mature woman's -- a mature woman in love -- repose;" "watching her, the impenetrable, the calm, the absolutely serene face;" "It was not solitude and certainly not idleness for Judith: the same impenetrable and serene face, only a little older now, a little thinner now;" "Not thin now but gaunt, the Sutpen skull showing indeed now through the worn, the Coldfield flesh, the face which had long since forgotten how to be young and yet absolutely impenetrable, absolutely serene: no mourning, not even grief."

As a female, Judith is secondary in the Southern structure; yet, she is the stronger of the two children. She is a "hoydden who could -- and did -- outrun and outclimb, and ride and fight both with and beside her brother."³⁶ Judith is the child who silently watches the fights from the hayloft; she is the child who urges the Negro driver to race the horse to the church.

³⁵Volpe, p. 207.

³⁶Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 67.

And Judith plays her social role. She follows Ellen to Memphis to buy clothes. She accompanies Ellen on neighborhood visits. She allows her brother and her mother to arrange her engagement. Mr. Compson's comment on the situation is quite revealing:

You can not even imagine him and Judith alone together. Try to do it and the nearest you can come is a projection of them while the two actual people were doubtless separate and elsewhere -- two shades pacing, serene and untroubled by flesh, in a summer garden -- the same two serene phantoms who see to watch, hover, impartial attentive and quiet. . . .³⁷

Mr. Compson attributes Judith's passive acceptance of the engagement period to the fact that Bon "was her first and last sweetheart. She must have seen him in fact with exactly the same eyes that Henry saw him with. And it would be hard to say to which of them he appeared the more splendid. . . ."38 Judith's inner self-will surely governed her in this non-engagement, this non-courtship. Bon and Judith saw one another "three times in two years, for a total period of seventeen days, counting the time which Ellen consumed; they parted without even saying goodbye."39

Judith acquiesces to Henry's probation but only to a certain "mutually recognized though unstated and undefined point." Once that point had been reached she would refuse in the same calm manner "to accept or give because of any traditional weakness of sex."40 She was waiting for Bon's letter, and when that came she was ready to marry

³⁷Ibid., p. 97.

³⁸Ibid., p. 95.

³⁹Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 91.

him, to become "the woman, the loved, the bride." Henry kills Bon to prevent the marriage, and, inexplicably, Judith does not protest the murder. She condones it.⁴¹

Judith's individuality comes alive during the wartime absence of her father and her brother. She and Clytie, her mulatto half-sister, run the plantation. Miss Rosa helps them to grow the small amount of produce necessary for survival. Judith sustains her suffering; she stops living in the present. According to Volpe, all her acts during the twenty years left of her life derive from that event in 1865, the death of Charles Bon.⁴²

Vickery also speaks of the self-imposed withdrawal of Judith.⁴³ She provides tombstones for Charles and his son, Etienne, whom she brings into her home and cares for. Her death occurs when she is nursing Etienne through an illness; she contracts the disease and dies.

Judith's single long speech in the novel sounds the important theme of individuality.⁴⁴ She takes Bon's letter to Mrs. Compson and tells her either to keep it or to throw it away as she likes. She gives some explanation for her or anyone's life:

Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others

⁴¹Vickery, p. 99.

⁴²Volpe, p. 208.

⁴³Vickery, p. 76.

⁴⁴Volpe, p. 197.

all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it. . . .⁴⁵

Judith Sutpen, of the impenetrable and serene face, is one of Faulkner's finest and most thinly drawn characters.

Mrs. Carolina Bascomb Compson is a neurotic, whining woman. Vickery characterizes her as having abandoned her humanity for the sake of pride or vanity or self-pity.⁴⁶ She enters the Southern pattern by marrying into the Compson family; she bears four children, but she can be a mother to only one of them -- Jason. Dilsey, the enduring family servant, assumes the responsibility of caring for the other three -- Quentin, Caddy, and Benjy. Mrs. Compson fades into her bedroom with psychosomatic illnesses and reappears with pathetic, irritating, and regular self-pity.

She is more concerned with appearances than with moral integrity: as long as her idiot son's name is changed to Benjy, she can feel free from any responsibility; she overlooks Caddy's promiscuity as long as marriage, and a promisingly profitable marriage at that, can cover up the dishonor; she is so completely self-absorbed that she considers her son Quentin's suicide only in matters of inconsideration to her.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 127.

⁴⁶Vickery, p. 47.

⁴⁷Volpe, p. 28.

Volpe states that Mrs. Compson is in constant retreat from reality, retaining a vision of herself as a refined, naive, fragile Southern lady.⁴⁸

Mrs. Compson's self-pity nurtures her foibles: she habitually wears black dressing gowns; she continues to support her alcoholic-wastrel brother Maury; she savors the idea of burning Caddy's checks for Miss Quentin's support; she always has her Bible open but never reads it. At times she is a rather dense, stupid woman. Notice, in the following dialogue, how she is the butt of Jason's acrid humor:

'You've got a prize set of servants,' Jason said. He helped his mother and himself to food. 'Did you ever have one that was worth killing? You must have had some before I was big enough to remember.'

'I have to humour them,' Mrs. Compson said. 'I have to depend on them so completely. It's not as if I were strong. I wish I were. I wish I could do all the house work myself. I could at least take that much off your shoulders.'

'And a fine pigsty we'd live in, too,' Jason said. 'Hurry up, Dilsey,' he shouted.

'I know you blame me,' Mrs. Compson said, 'for letting them off to go to church today.'

'Go where?' Jason said. 'Hasn't that damn show left yet?'

'To church,' Mrs. Compson said. 'The darkies are having a special Easter service. I promised Dilsey two weeks ago that they could get off.'

'Which means we'll eat cold dinner,' Jason said, 'or none at all.'

'I know it's my fault,' Mrs. Compson said. 'I know you blame me.'

'For what?' Jason said. 'You never resurrected Christ, did you?'⁴⁹

Faulkner is not kind in portraying Mrs. Compson because she is not a very kind person. She is content with her secondary role if she is taken care of, but even then she lives in her neuroticism.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁹William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: Modern Library, 1929), pp. 294-295.

Candace "Caddy" Compson is the only Compson capable of giving herself to love and to life; while everyone else in the family is self-absorbed, Caddy has qualities and drives of her own. The only vibrant, warm, and loving person in the Compson family has an elusive reality.⁵⁰

Vickery theorizes that Caddy Compson, like Thomas Sutpen, is never directly presented, and like him, she becomes a tremendously vital as well as an enigmatic figure by being the object of intense concern for a number of characters. The difference is that Caddy, unlike Sutpen, provides a static rather than dynamic center.⁵¹ Caddy is central to her three brothers and means something different to each. For Benjy she is the smell of trees; for Quentin, honor, or the concept of it; for Jason, money or at least the means of obtaining it. Volpe states that Caddy is by no means a paragon of virtue, but whatever her weaknesses and her sins, she achieves stature because she opens her heart to those around her.⁵² She loves her brothers; in fact, she provides them, particularly Quentin and Benjy, the female love and tenderness that their mother could or would not give them.

Caddy could have been a victim of the Southern male hierarchy system, but she instead accepts the inevitability of change and wishes to assert her own identity. Vickery summarizes this fact in relation to Quentin:

Insofar as virginity is a concept, associated with virtue and honor, it becomes the center of Quentin's world, and since it is also physically

⁵⁰Vickery, p. 238.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 84.

⁵²Volpe, p. 101.

present in Caddy, it forms a precarious link between his world and that of experience. Mr. Compson remarks that virginity is merely a transient physical state which has been given its ethical significance by men. What they have chosen to make it mean is something which is a defiance of nature, an artificial isolation of the woman. Caddy, who seems almost a symbol of the blind forces of nature, is an unstable guardian for that 'concept of Compson honor precariously and . . . only temporarily supported by the minute-fragile membrane of her maidenhead.'⁵³

Caddy's dilemma is that she must sacrifice her own responses to life if she is to keep her brothers happy; however, she is too much alive, too full of passion to bury herself in her family's concept of her own shame.⁵⁴ Faulkner furthers Caddy's story in his Appendix to The Sound and the Fury, written sixteen years after the book's 1929 publication date, when he did not own or possess a copy of his own novel.⁵⁵

Faulkner's final description of Caddy, whom "he had always regarded with a mixture of horror and unwilling affection," is brilliant.⁵⁶

Caddy is "ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned."⁵⁷

Miss Eunice Habersham, whose name is now the oldest remaining in the county, appeared earlier as Miss Belle Worsham in "Go Down, Moses." Miss Belle is "quite old too -- thin, erect, with a neat, old-time piling of white beneath a faded hat of thirty years ago."⁵⁸ Miss Eunice is a "kinless spinster of seventy living in the columned colonial house,"

⁵³Vickery, p. 37.

⁵⁴Volpe, p. 99.

⁵⁵Malcolm Cowley, "The Solitude of William Faulkner," The Atlantic Monthly, CCXVII (June, 1966), 105.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁷Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, p. 12.

⁵⁸William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York: Modern Library, 1940), p. 374.

inherited from her father, with the two Negro servants who help her raise chickens and vegetables to sell. Miss Eunice wears Sears Roebuck dresses while her shoes and gloves are "made to her measure in a New York shop."⁵⁹ The Habersham name, the thirty dollar shoes, the expensive gloves -- all link her to the tradition of the Southern lady; however, Miss Habersham is the exception to her class and her sex.

Her involvement with Lucas Beauchamp's arrest for the murder of a white man reveals this exception. She acts independently; her responses are not predetermined by her blood, her class, and her sex. Vickery says that she is moved by something more compelling than logic and propriety.⁶⁰ Similarly Miss Worsham involves herself by making arrangements with Gavin Stevens to bring home the body of Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, Mollie Beauchamp's Negro grandson executed in Illinois; Miss Worsham speaks of his death and its effect upon the family as "our grief."⁶¹ Miss Habersham recognizes kinship with Lucas and Molly Beauchamp, as does Miss Worsham with Mollie. [In "Go Down, Moses" Mollie is spelled with an ie; in Intruder in the Dust Molly is spelled with a y.] Miss Habersham refuses to repudiate or to forget that she and Molly grew up together "almost inextricably like sisters, like twins."⁶² Miss Worsham states that "Mollie and I were born in the same month. We grew up together as sisters would."⁶³ Skin color has little to do with affection and respect for the other person.

⁵⁹William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Modern Library, 1948), p. 77.

⁶⁰Vickery, p. 140.

⁶¹Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, p. 381.

⁶²Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, p. 87.

⁶³Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, p. 375.

Vickery states that Miss Habersham is a good example of the "emancipated" woman emerging from the shadowy background of sheltered femininity, as it is usually the older woman who show this strength and determination.⁶⁴ Vickery also feels that in the traditional concept of Southern male hierarchy it is as if the woman's individuality can be only expressed after the termination of her function as a childbearer.⁶⁵ Yet, Miss Habersham has been living her individuality; she does not assume the fact or state after the cessation of certain biological functions. She has always been Miss Habersham, a woman capable of recognizing the humanness in each person. She is one of Faulkner's delightfully admirable characters; Miss Worsham rates admiration for her dignity and compassion.

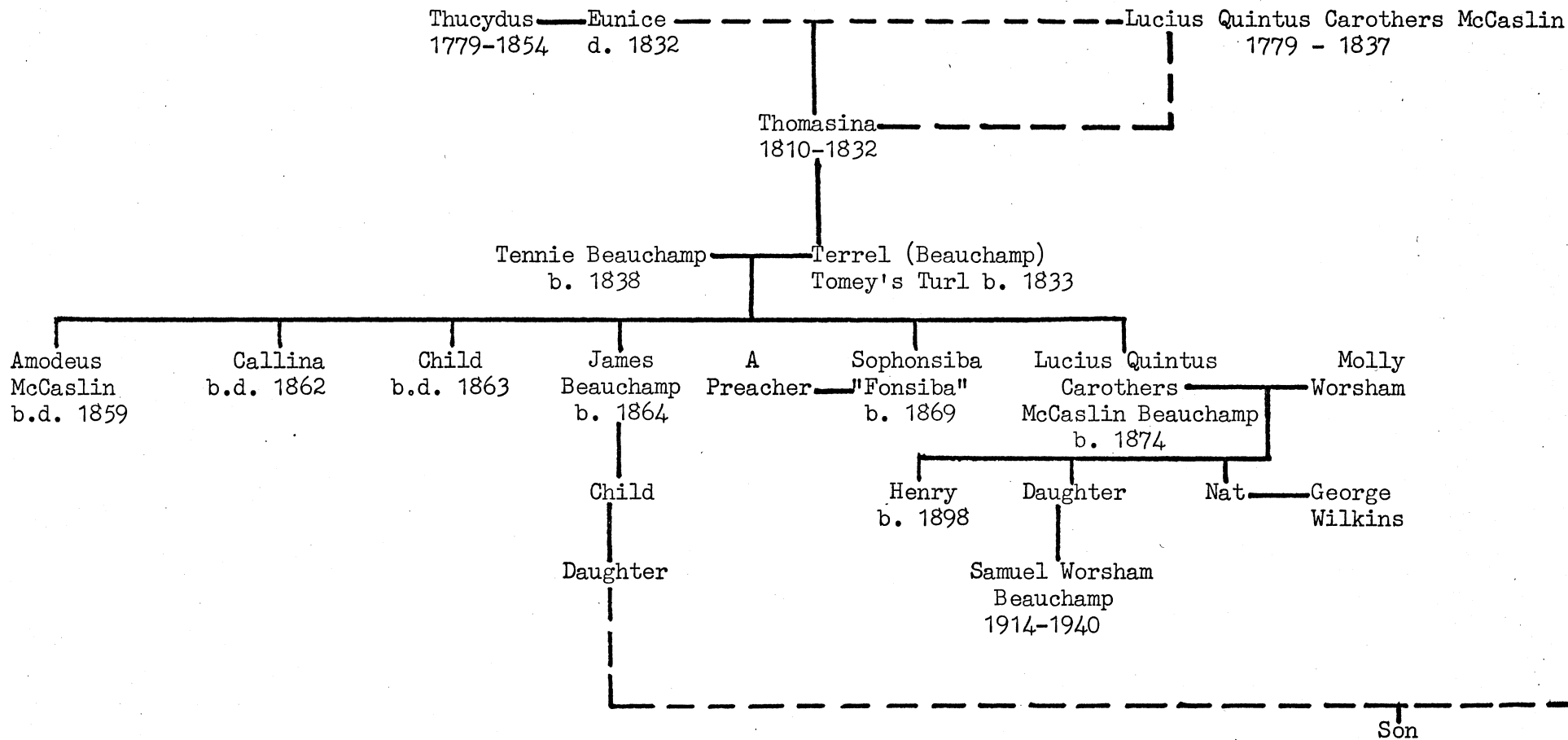
Mrs. Mallison, Chick's mother in Intruder in the Dust, is definitely a twentieth century feminine figure. She grew up outside or beyond the confines of the traditional concept of being a Southern lady even though she brought a good name to the marriage and she bore a male heir. Mrs. Mallison will darn socks along side Miss Habersham, sitting in the doorway of the county jail; yet, she is quite a contrast to Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp, or to the female Coldfields and Sutpens, or to the Compson women. But then, a hundred years had passed, a war had been fought that destroyed the foundations for tradition, and the old aristocracy had died with an inbred decay. The present men seem to exist within the past and abstractions; the women manage to survive.

⁶⁴Vickery, p. 259.

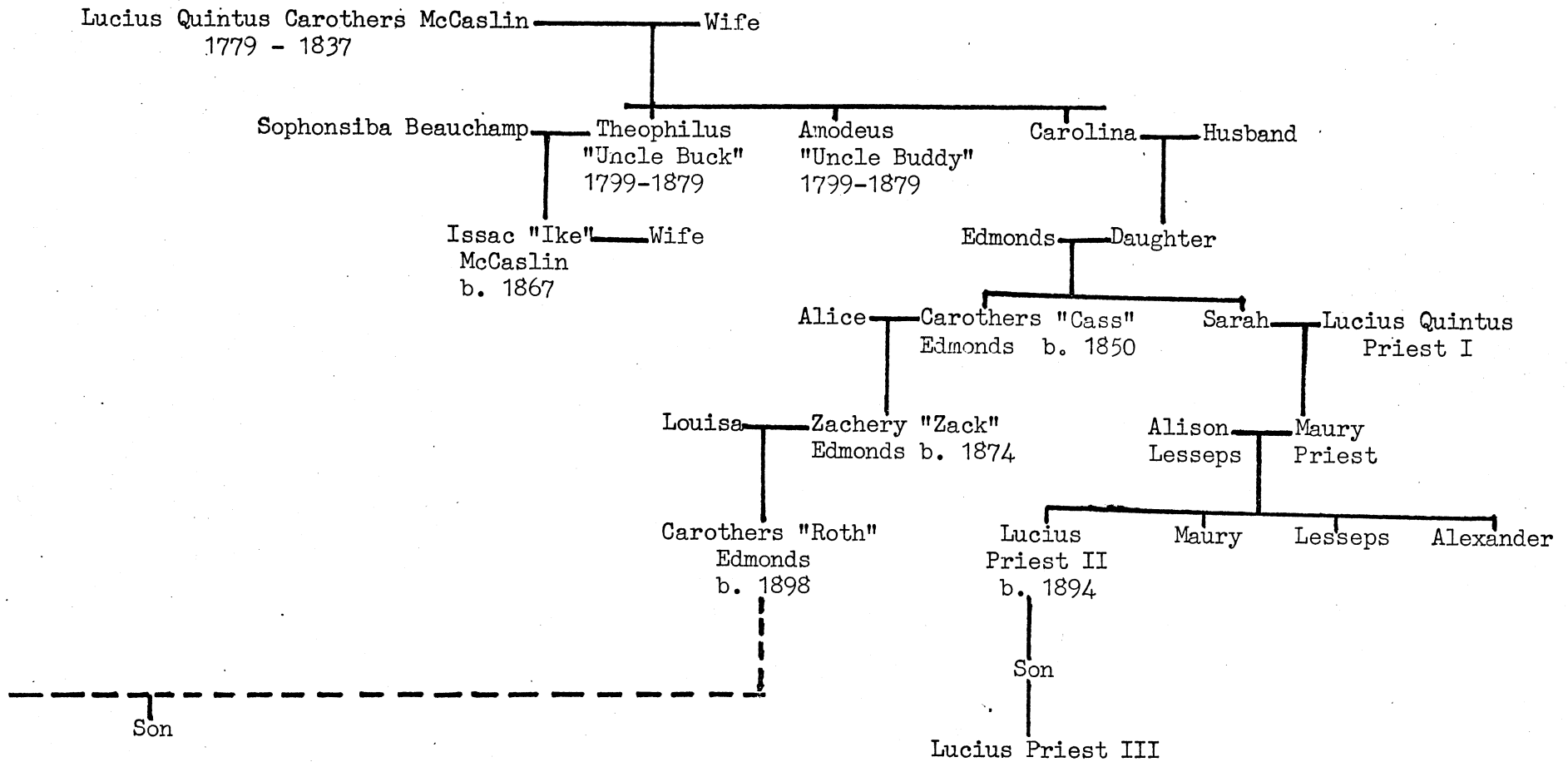
⁶⁵Ibid.

Adaptability is a good characteristic to possess, for, as Caddy Compson learned, change is inevitable. Faulkner subtly notes this change in his female characterizations of the Southern gentlewoman. Faulkner listens to his ladies being ghosts.

NEGRO McCASLIN - BEAUCHAMP GENEALOGY

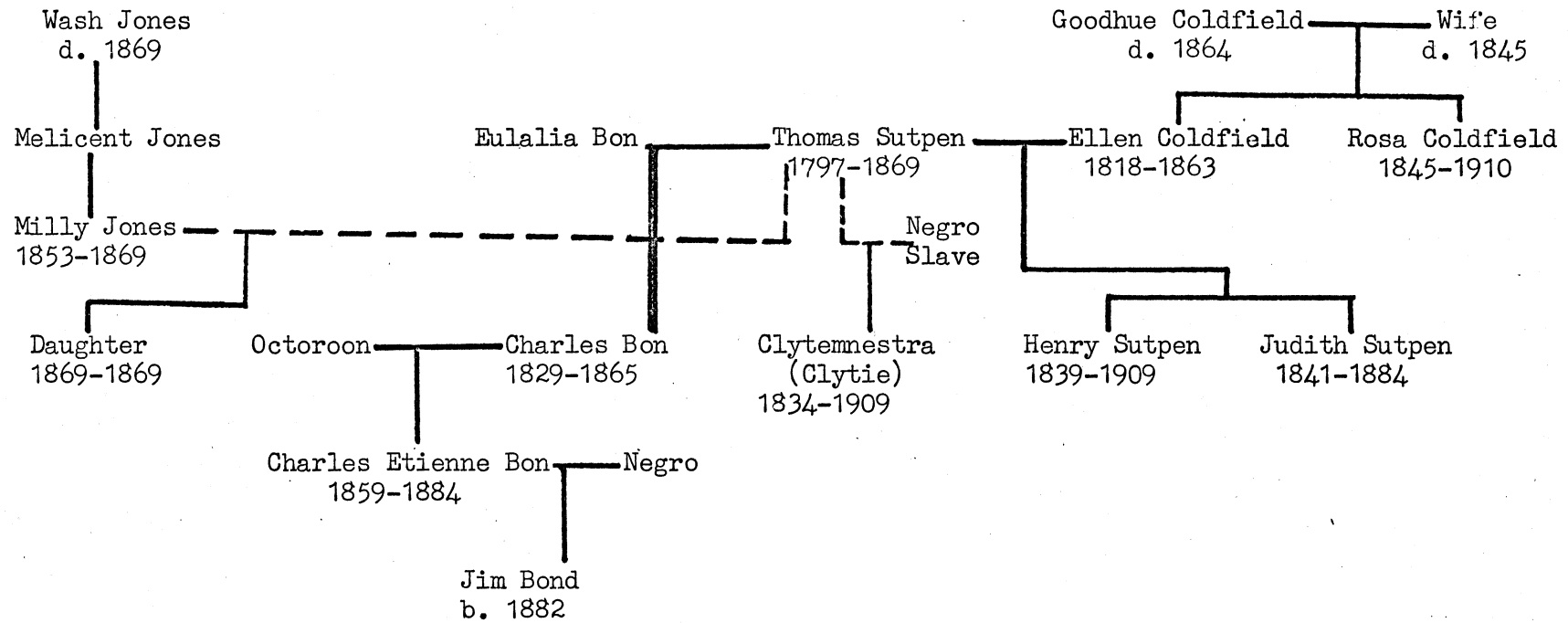


McCASLIN - BEAUCHAMP GENEALOGY⁶⁶



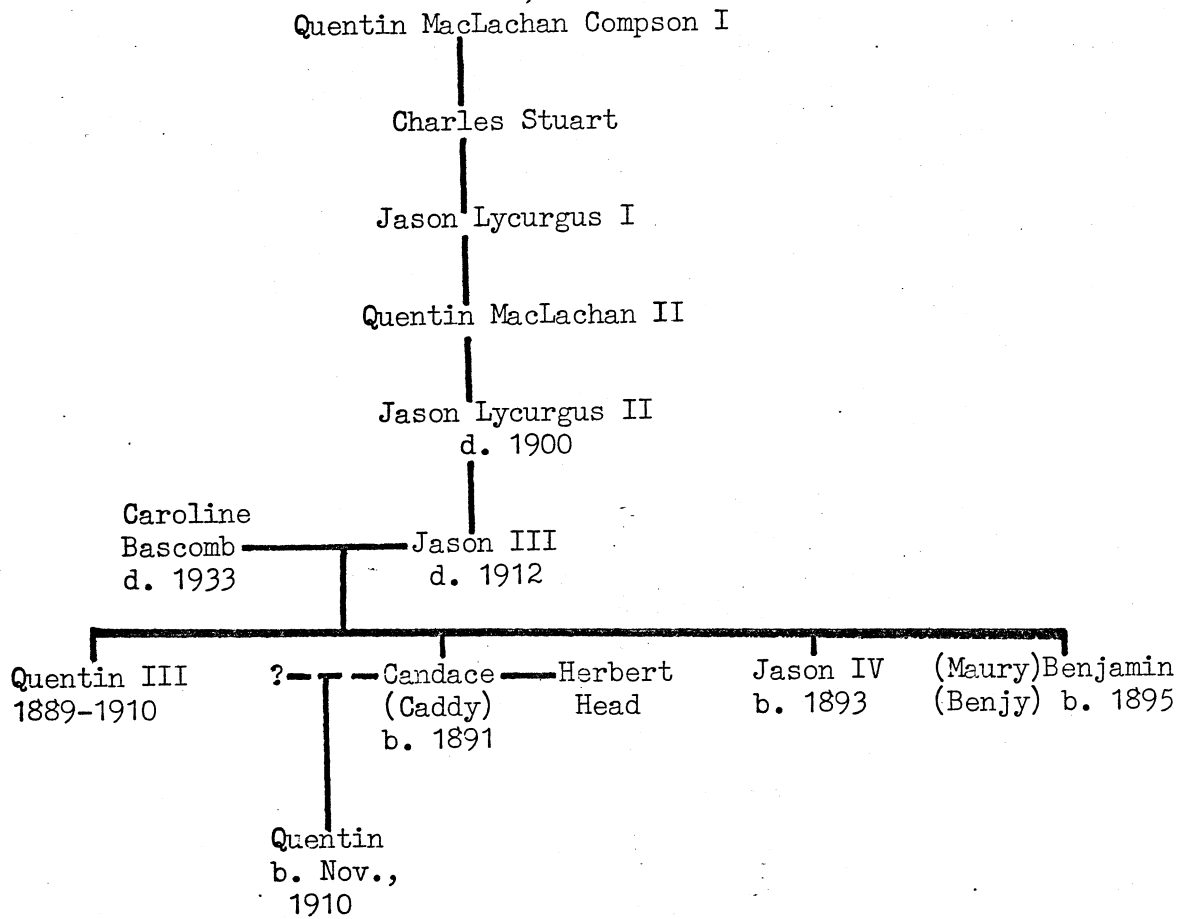
⁶⁶Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 448.

COLDFIELD - SUTPEN GENEALOGY⁶⁷

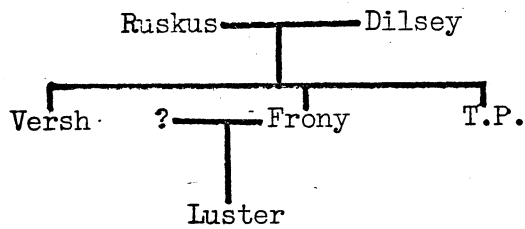


⁶⁷Ibid., p. 451.

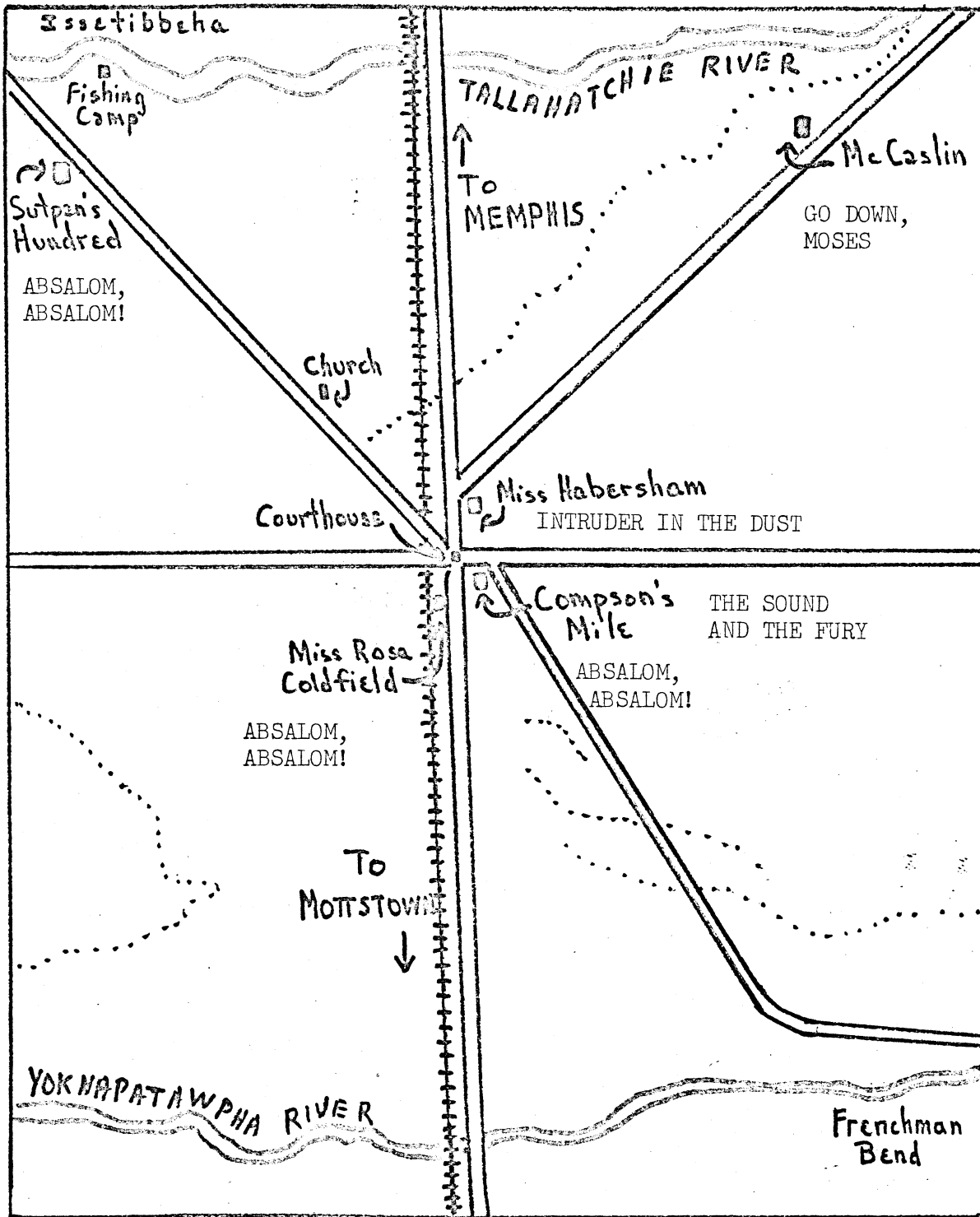
COMPSON GENEALOGY⁶⁸



COMPSON NEGROES



⁶⁸Ibid., p. 447.



JEFFERSON, YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI
Area, 2400 Square Miles -- Population, Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313
William Faulkner, Sole Owner & Proprietor

⁶⁹Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!

Bibliography

- Brooks, Cleanth. William Faulkner The Yoknapatawpha Country.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Cowley, Malcolm. "The Solitude of William Faulkner," The Atlantic Monthly, CCXVII (June, 1966), 97-115.
- Faulkner, William. Absalom, Absalom! New York: Modern Library, 1936.
- Faulkner, William. Go Down, Moses. New York: Modern Library, 1940.
- Faulkner, William. Intruder in the Dust. New York: Modern Library, 1948.
- Faulkner, William. The Sound and the Fury. New York: Modern Library,
1929.
- Tuck, Dorothy. Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner. New York: Thomas Y.
Crowell Company, 1964.
- Vickery, Olga W. The Novels of William Faulkner, Louisiana State
University Press, 1959.
- Volpe, Edmond L. A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner. New York:
Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964.